

AL VALLIAPPA —AN EXTINGUISHED BEACON

—INDIRA ANANTHAKRISHNAN

Children's voices ring out loud and clear as they sing the immaculately created verses of Al Valliappa, effervescing with rhyme and rhythm. But the voice of the gifted poet himself has been stilled forever. A precious gem of Tamil children's literature is lost to the world. For children's literature of Tamil Nadu, it is an irreplaceable loss.

Death, the great leveller, has done his duty. But what a shock to see the great 'banyan tree' shrivel and wither after a brief illness, at the active age of sixty-seven! Al Valliappa was a "Kughandai Kairngyar" (children's poet), and wrote songs and poems for children with great love, dedication and perseverance. It became his life-time ambition to raise the status of children's literature and he continued to work for it till his last breath. He was a monolith, a monument, a monument in himself.

Creating rhymes for children was his speciality, although he did write interesting prose as well. Reciting his rhymes gave immense pleasure to children. His rhymes

included all types of interesting topics and themes suitable for the child reader including nonsense rhymes, story poems, hilarious and thought-provoking ones, that provided healthy entertainment to children and also imbibed into their growing minds values basic to their growth and development.

Always cheerful and smiling, but shy and reticent, Al Valliappa went out of his way to promote and help up and coming aspiring children's writers. Under the banner of "Kuzhandai Ezhuththaalar Sangam" (Association of Writers for Children), he worked incessantly for the cause of children's literature.

Al-180, Annanagar—his residence in Madras, was busy as a beehive. It was the meeting ground for writers, children buzzed in and out to collect or return books at the library there; or it was a storytelling session, when a packed room of children sat, all ears, listening to stories. Even freshly written manuscripts were read out. Who could be better evaluators of those manuscripts than the children themselves? Valliappa would then convince the publisher of the quality of the manuscripts and arrange for their early publication. Needless to say, the authors were immensely grateful to him.

After retiring from bank service, Valliappa devoted himself totally to children's literature. He spent a lot of time with children who loved to gather round him to recite his rhymes. He worked with zest and zeal, determined to play a long innings. But Fate decreed otherwise, and suddenly, Al Valliappa was gone from our midst. It was a shattering blow to all those connected with children's literature.

But Al Valliappa would live through his rhymes which have delighted the children of Tamilnadu all these years and would continue to delight the children of generations to come.